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ABSTRACT

The report describes a site visit to the Seven Counties Services Region in Kentucky to identify and document promising practices for serving people with severe disabilities in integrated community-based services. The regional agency serves Jefferson, Oldham, Henry, Trimble, Spencer, Bullitt and Shelby Counties. Regional service priorities have included integrated preschools, family supports, and individualized residential alternatives which emphasize the principle of normalization. The visit identified five promising practices: a commitment to developing personal and meaningful relationships between people with developmental disabilities and non-handicapped people; an emphasis on keeping services small and personal; a focus on the centrality of the individual instead of the program; a commitment to children living with families instead of in a group environment; and a focus on both self- and external evaluation of services. (DB)

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SITE VISIT REPORT

SEVEN COUNTIES SERVICES

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

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SITE VISIT REPORT

Seven Counties Services

Louisville, Kentucky
June 13 and 14, 1985

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I. Introduction

This report is based on a site visit to the Seven Counties Services Region in Kentucky on June 13 and 14, 1985. The purpose of the visit was to obtain information on programs and practices for serving people with severe developmental disabilities in community settings.

The site visit included review of a variety of written and visual materials, a visit to a family's home and an in-home support program, and formal/informal discussions with four administrators of the Mental Retardation Services of Seven Counties Services MH/MR Board, Inc., administrators of three affiliated agencies, head of the Seven Counties Services' advisory group and school/in-home support service personnel.

The purpose of the site visit was not to evaluate the area's services, but to identify and document "promising practices" and "good ideas" for serving people with severe disabilities and challenging needs in integrated community - based settings.

II. Background Information - Seven Counties Services (SCS)

Seven Counties Services MH/MR Board, Inc. is one of fourteen regional agencies in Kentucky designated to carry out the state mandate to provide comprehensive community services to people with mental disabilities. This private, non-profit agency, is responsible for the counties of Jefferson, Oldham, Henry, Trimble, Spencer, Bullitt and Shelby. Direct services are provided primarily by affiliates who have subcontracts with SCS. Although the agency also provides mental health and alcohol/drug abuse services, this report focuses on the mental retardation portion

of their mandate.

"The MR/DD Office plans for future services, monitors existing affiliate agencies, and coordinates system issues" related to persons with mental retardation and/or developmental disabilities. SCS also directly operates a Direction Service program that provides a central point of entry for services, case management, follow up, monitoring and data collection. The MR/DD Office is also directly developing and operating work station options for adults.

Seven Counties Services manages a budget of approximately $3 million. The regional service priorities have included a strong focus on community services for children including integrated preschools, family supports and individualized residential alternatives. At least since 1979, the region has funnelled no new money toward segregated settings. Title XIX Medicaid waiver funds have been a primary source of funding for new non-educational services.

As an agency, Seven Counties Services adheres to and promotes the principle of normalization and of services provided in the least restrictive manner possible. As reflected in their mission statement, there is an emphasis on creating opportunities for meaningful and high quality interactions with non-handicapped persons, on respecting/facilitating social/emotional bonds between mentally retarded persons and others, and of respecting the contributions of mentally retarded citizens to individual nonretarded citizens and the community.

III. Promising Practices

The Seven Counties Services' Region has a lot to offer to other parts of the country. Primary themes in this region include:

* a powerful commitment to developing personal and meaningful relationships between people with developmental disabilities and non-handicapped people;
* an emphasis on keeping services small and personal; on doing "small things right";
* a focus on the centrality of the individual instead of the program;
* a strong commitment to children living with families instead of in a group environment; a commitment to match individuals with challenging behavioral needs and/or medically fragile "folks" with families;
* a focus on both self and external evaluation of services.

Commitment to Relationship Development

The powerful message conveyed in this region is a strong commitment to developing personal, meaningful relationships between people with developmental disabilities and non-handicapped people. The heavy "skill" emphasis typical of many developmental services is overshadowed by the fundamental human value of a meaningful life that includes the caring and support of "non-paid" others.

The development of relationships in this region also plays the role of "a safeguard." As stated by one staff member, "What better role can a service provider or family play than to insure

that there are people around who care about or are friends with a person with a disability?" The service provider or the family cannot be with the person all the time. Acquaintances and friends provide "the eyes and ears" that can protect against exploitation and abuse.

Emphasis on Keeping Services Small and Personal

In this region, both people's homes and the size of the residential component of an agency are designed to be small and personal. For example, a five-person "group home" in this region is considered large, and residential components serving over 60 people are seen as less than desirable.

Two primary residential service providers, Community Living and Community Connections, emphasized that no significant expansion was planned for either of their programs. As one director stated, it would be better to "spin off a new agency" if needed. At Community Living, 28 people are served in individual settings, 12 in small group homes (3-5 persons) and 17 children through "placement" with a family. Community Connections serves 19 people through "family placements" with an additional 20 families receiving in-home support through their medicaid waiver services.

Designing services that are small and personal offer a number of advantages. First, it is easier for all staff members, including administrators, to know each person receiving services. Second, the smaller number of people allows greater "energy" to be available for developing a community network for each individual. Third, the small size encourages a greater level of

individualization. Fourth, the smaller, more integrated services increase the opportunities for the development of meaningful relationships between people with developmental disabilities and non-handicapped people.

Centrality of the Individual instead of the Program

This practice is of critical importance in the design and implementation of both service systems and individual program plans. The emphasis on relationships networks, in many ways, demands that the individual not the program remain central in planning.

In Louisville, a medicaid-funded program called Options for Individuals, Inc. serves severely disabled people through a variety of community-based activities. The nature, location and type of service are developed for each individual. In addition to activities in integrated settings, Options looks at alternatives in the person's own home neighborhood and assesses the alternatives based on their probable value in fostering meaningful relationships for that person.

Through Community Living, a home for three older women was developed by a "mix and match" of funding. Two of the three women received funding through Title XIX with the third person funded through state purpose funds. The "match" of the women took precedence over the uniformity of a single funding source.

Family Empowerment and Support

Seven Counties Services, Inc. supports families, both natural families and "foster" families. As stated by the MR/DD Director, "children belong in a family not in a group home."

Seven Counties Services provides respite and family support services both directly through a state grant and indirectly through two medicaid-funded in-home support programs. Community Connections, has a variety of workers on personal service contracts with the agency. Respite payments are made directly to the families who then pass on the payments to the workers. Through the state grant, funds are used as flexibly as possible to meet the real needs of the family. For example, when necessary, funds were used for essential cleaning items (e.g., washcloths, soap) that were prerequisites to continued home aide service.

Children who do not have or can no longer live with their natural family are "matched" with a family selected for them through Community Living or Community Connections. The hallmarks of this approach that distinguish it from traditional foster care are: (1) the degree of emphasis placed on a "match" between the child and the family, (2) the ability to match "medically fragile" and "behaviorally challenging" children with families, (3) the empowerment of the "foster" family in decision-making regarding the child's life and (4) the availability of accessible supports for the family.

"Michelle" was a young girl who was both self-abusive and very aggressive toward other people. A family was found for her, a family who would not be "intimidated by her", who would hold on to her and provide the structure, love and discipline that she needed. Today "Michelle" continues to live with her family.

The major problem to overcome in placing "Tim", a four year

old boy who had both serious seizures and was anancephalic, was not family recruitment. The first time the young couple met "Tim", they wanted to take him home. The social worker at the pediatric hospital strongly discouraged the couple, but they persisted. Finally "Tim" was able to leave the hospital and the "match" was made.

"Foster" families in Louisville are encouraged to make decisions regarding "their child's life." Many of the families have actually become legal guardians and a few have adopted. A number of administrators mentioned the importance of allowing families to make decisions including "mistakes". For instance, the service provider may strongly support integrated schools, but the families themselves may decide that a segregated option is preferred. In order to fully include a child in the family, the family needs to be empowered to make such decisions.

In Louisville, "foster" families are given support. More than anything else, families need to be able to reach someone at the time they feel they need help. Having a support person available on weekends and evenings (who can go to the home if necessary) seems pivotal. As one director said, "it is not that I do anything; just being there and caring seems most important." Other supports offered to families include respite and parent-to-parent support.

Self/External Evaluation

This region places a particularly strong emphasis on external evaluation, feedback and sharing. There is a strong interest in both learning from others and in letting others know of their learnings.

Integrated Educational Options

Although not a focus area for the Community Integration Project, several integrated educational programs in the Seven Counties Services Region are worth noting. The Brown Model School Project is an innovative program at the elementary/middle school level serving four students with disabilities in regular classes. In addition, integrated preschool classes are being expanded to twelve sites and will include both moderately and severely handicapped children.

IV. Conclusion

This report on the Seven Counties Services Region in Kentucky has focused only on the strengths and "promising practices" of this area. Seven Counties Services has a lot of lessons to offer to others. In particular, their powerful commitment to relationships and their efforts to serve children with great needs in family situations will remain with me.

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